









**THE KAPPA DELTA PI LECTURE SERIES**

**DEMOCRACY  
AS A WAY OF LIFE**



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DEMOCRACY  
AS A WAY OF LIFE

*By*  
*BOYD H. BODE*

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## PREFACE

It is a commonplace that we are living in a period of rapid change. For decades back man's changing status in the material universe has been a favorite theme with writers and speakers. Our conquest of nature, after it once really got under way, was so rapid and so impressive that it was a delight to linger in admiring retrospect over the record of the past century in order to get the full savor of it. At last, so we fondly believed, man had come into his heritage. He was no longer the slave but the master. He had learned how to rub the magic lamp of science so as to compel the mysterious forces of his environment to do his bidding. The road along which he had come so recently was marked with triumphs which left no doubt of his invincibility. Ahead of him were glorious vistas of further triumphs—over hunger and fear and grinding toil and disease and injustice and perhaps even over death itself.

The habit of dwelling on the past is still with us. But the perspective has changed. We are beginning to realize that progress is not a simple matter of adding continuously to the long list of victories over nature. These very victories, so we have learned, can easily become new sources of injustice and oppression, and they can be turned into terrifying instruments of destruction. We are haunted by the disturbing thought that nature may have permitted us to strut before the footlights for a brief moment in order to make us the victims of a grim and relentless joke. While we were naïvely boasting of our power over nature we were perhaps unwittingly cooperating to make our bondage more complete than ever before. In former times the struggle centered on the problem of creating a civilization which would afford a certain measure of protection against the tyranny of nature. But now we are faced with the possibility that the very civilization which we have created will not submit to our control and will not tolerate our aspirations. It will either insist on destroying itself through future wars or it will require us to abandon all those dreams of democratic liberty

and spiritual independence which we formerly assumed to be the inevitable concomitants of material progress. Our earlier simple enthusiasms are beginning to look childish.

The clouds that gather round the setting sun  
Do take a sober coloring from an eye  
That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality.

It is not only futile but dangerous to ignore the fact that the new forces which have been turned loose in our industrial and economic structure through the applications of science and technology are threatening to create havoc. They are reinforcing aims and purposes which we formerly regarded not only as permissible but as praiseworthy; and this reinforcement has reached such proportions as to endanger the whole social structure. If these forces are to be held to the status of servants and are not to be permitted to become masters, we must undertake a revision of the aims and purposes for which they are to be employed. This seems to be the moral of the story. In other words, if we desire to remain a democratic people we must re-examine and reinterpret the meaning of de-

mocracy. We must face the fact that democracy in this modern world is no longer the simple concept that it was in earlier times, but that it involves the reconstruction of the whole mass of traditional beliefs and attitudes and practices, so as to become the basis for a distinctive way of life.

Such reconstruction obviously becomes a primary obligation for education. It is no accident that precisely those countries which profess to be democratic are at present the very ones which are vague or hazy with respect to social aims in education and which are least successful in providing outlets for the enthusiasms that find expression in the youth movements of other countries. The outstanding need in our system of education is the need of a new orientation. There is no problem before the American people which even approximates in importance the problem of what democracy is to mean in our own day and generation. This problem is difficult enough without being made still more difficult by the confusions and the obstacles that are contributed by our present-day education. If democracy is eventually doomed to defeat, as

many people believe, its downfall will be traceable more directly to its failure to keep its own meaning and purpose clear than to anything that may be done by its enemies from the outside.

BOYD H. BODE

Columbus, Ohio  
January 26,



## EDITORIAL FOREWORD

The ninth volume of the Kappa Delta Pi Lecture Series offers the public a penetrating and inspiring interpretation of an idea that at the present time is being examined more critically than ever in the past. The author sketches the several attitudes toward democracy in the development of the United States and the effect that these attitudes have had upon the attending conceptions and practices of government. In pioneer times government was regarded as a protector of men and women struggling with the wilderness. Only in so far as such protection was needed and vouchsafed government was tolerated. In sharp contrast to this seemingly selfish acceptance of government is Dr. Bode's lofty view of it as a "way of life" to be followed by all, young and old, for the good of all. In essence democracy means the good life and the good life is basically social, and not individualistic. Freedom and equality involve an impar-

tial distribution of the benefits for the assuring of which society exists. When such an equitable distribution is withheld there will be eventual and violent protest. So viewed the present conflict in Europe, as Dr. Bode clearly shows, may be called a struggle for a democratic way of life.

Genuine democracy, however, is inborn; it cannot be superimposed. It is the fruitage of education, of early and continuous cultivation. Hence the school "must be a place where pupils go, not merely to learn, but to carry on a way of life." It is in such a school that the pupil will learn that the "primary obligation of a democratic community to its members is to provide for each the opportunity to share in the common life according to interest and capacity." And because in the past democratic government (as then conceived) was a mere protection for *laissez-faire* living, today the "school is clearly under the obligation to show that democracy is a way of life which breaks sharply with the past. It must not merely practice democracy but develop the doctrine so as to make it serviceable as an intellectual basis for the organization of life." The purpose of the school, therefore, is unique. It is "the institution to which a democratic society is



entitled to look for clarification of the meaning of democracy. In other words, "*the school is peculiarly the institution in which democracy becomes conscious of itself.*" The means to this end are not impulse or emotion but knowledge of the meaning and significance of living in a community. It follows that the good life is the rational or the intelligent life, as was so repeatedly emphasized in Greek philosophy. Hence "the primary aim of education is to set intelligence free."

The reader will find in the present volume a clear-eyed and intelligible study of the interrelations between democracy and education. The author does not hesitate to criticise certain extreme types of activity schools in which "there is no adequate social theory or frame of reference for judging and guiding educational procedures, and so ideas inevitably tend to run wild." Such schools are not a way of life "but a combination of clinic and playroom." There is profound wisdom in the author's observation that "progress lies not in the substitution of names for old habits but in the transformation of old habits into a new quality of mind and heart." And again: "The escape from the bond-

age of tradition does not lie in the substitution of one set of beliefs for another but in providing the conditions for the free play of intelligence in the reconstruction of patterns." The school should offer new soil, expert transplanting, and vigilant cultivation of the young life. Here freedom and discipline are fused at the very core of living.

As presented at Kappa Delta Pi's annual dinner in New Orleans on the evening of February 23, 1937 the content of the present volume was necessarily abbreviated. In its present complete form *Democracy as a Way of Life* is an important and challenging contribution to the literature in educational and social philosophy. Dr. Bode thinks clearly and searchingly, and he has the rare gift of a crystalline style through which his thought may be transparently viewed. In the midst of the prevailing misunderstanding of the meaning of democracy and democratic education the present volume is a welcome searchlight along a way of life.

ALFRED L. HALL-QUEST

EDITOR KAPPA DELTA PI LECTURE SERIES

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*An Address Given at the KAPPA DELTA PI  
Dinner the Twenty-third of February,*



## CHAPTER I

### THE NEED OF WIDENING THE CONCEPT OF DEMOCRACY

A DISILLUSIONED pedagog is reported to have expressed the opinion that words are a means of concealing the absence of thought. For this pessimistic view, it must be admitted, a considerable body of evidence is available. Controversies furnish abundant illustrations. When our emotions become involved, words tend to become transformed correspondingly into slogans or fighting terms, heavily charged with feeling and at best carrying only a dim penumbra of meaning. In current discussions of world events, for example, we constantly encounter such terms as communism, fascism, socialism, democracy, capitalism, and the like. These terms occur over and over again, but frequency of repetition does not go hand in hand with pro-

gressive clarification of meaning. Its effect is rather to build the terms so intimately into our responses that the responses become a substitute for thinking. The purpose of propaganda is essentially to secure just this result. Its aim is to make the desired response as spontaneous as our responses to mother, home, and heaven.

Something of this kind is presumably what our behavioristic friends mean by the term "conditioning." Taken in a non-technical sense the process of conditioning doubtless has its uses. In routine affairs the close tie-up between stimulus and response makes it possible to get things done smoothly and effectively. But if we are confronted with the necessity of securing a new orientation, this very smoothness of response becomes an obstacle. The lady at the prayer meeting who got so much comfort out of "that blessed word Mesopotamia" obviously purchased spiritual exaltation at the price of insight. The word became a means of concealing the absence of thought. In her case this may not have mattered a great deal. But if we admit the possibility that the reaction of the American people to the word democracy is somewhat anal-



ogous, we have a situation to which we cannot remain cheerfully indifferent. To deal appropriately with present-day conditions requires something more than a state of mind. The fact that the idea of democracy is being challenged in every part of the civilized world cannot be passed over lightly. Movements like communism and fascism may owe their existence, at any rate in part, to the shortcomings of the historical concept of democracy. If so, our democratic institutions cannot be protected by the simple process of "conditioning ourselves" to respond affirmatively to one set of slogans and negatively to those of these other movements. The idea of democracy will have to be examined and reinterpreted, in the light of rival concepts, so as to make it adequate for the conditions of present-day life.

If we undertake to compare traditional democracy with some of its chief present-day rivals, one outstanding difference is of special significance. From the standpoint of American tradition, the concept of democracy is distinctive in that it is an exclusively political term. It is commonly associated with the principle of ma-

jority rule. The fact that a person believed in the principle of democracy was supposed to carry no necessary implications with respect to his economic, ethical or religious beliefs. It seemed to be taken for granted that the belief in democracy could be kept in a separate intellectual compartment.

This is by no means true in the case of those present-day movements which are commonly regarded as a challenge to democracy. It would hardly do to say that the communism of the Soviet Republics, for example, is just a political concept. On the contrary, it is a determining influence in every major area of life. The abolition of the profit motive and the provisions for social planning have to do, first of all, with the realm of economics. The reliance on science to the exclusion of all belief in the supernatural collides head-on with the standpoint of traditional religion. The inculcation of the view that the accumulation of personal wealth is a disgraceful thing, that sex-relations are subject to no regulation save the principle of social consequences, and that work is an obligation devolving upon everyone—all this falls obviously

within the sphere of ethics. The total conception of a good life and a good social order naturally has its repercussions in the field of art. Distinctively political meanings are encountered only when we come to the system of representation and the role of the communist party in the control of affairs. But these things all hang together. There is no compartmentalization. To know that a person is a communist, in the strict or party sense of the term, is to know a great deal about him. In contrast with our historical democracy, communism is a comprehensive or inclusive scheme for the organization of the whole of life.

In this respect the regime of Adolf Hitler in Germany is essentially the same. It likewise represents a doctrine which has direct and significant bearings for all the important concerns of life. In content and purpose it is, of course, miles apart from the gospel of communism. Its point of departure lies in the conception of racial differences. These differences are asserted to be ultimate and irreducible, which is clearly a proposition in biology. From this proposition it is but a short step to further conclusions. There

are superior races and there are "lesser breeds." A superior race is entitled to claim that its aspirations have cosmic sanction, that it is the Lord's chosen people. Biology thus leads over into a corresponding theology. This sets the stage for the organization and regulation of everything else. Protection against contamination from other races becomes a solemn duty; the right of a race to expand and to conquer admits of no argument; and the cultivation of interests such as law, ethics, art and religion must all be guided by this idea of racial distinctiveness. In short, as in the case of communism, we find ourselves in the presence not of a limited political doctrine, but of an inclusive philosophy of life.

If we view these two doctrines for a moment with a coldly intellectual eye, we must concede to them a certain architectonic magnificence which is sadly lacking in the creed of democracy. In each case the doctrine is a house with many mansions, but constructed according to a single plan. All the different areas of life are integrated with one another, at any rate in principle. Conduct in any particular area is rein-

forced and directed through relationship with all the other areas. Whether a person acts as a citizen, or as a producer, or as a consumer, he is conscious of an overarching purpose, which provides new meanings and new incentives for what he is doing. In other words, it provides a comprehensive plan for the organization of both individual and collective conduct, which is essentially what is meant when we speak of a *way of life*. Such a way of life often has a surprising power in making life more meaningful and releasing latent energies. It is precisely the increment of meaning, with its concomitants of appreciations, which raises the routine life of human beings above that of the brutes. Life must be made meaningful if it is to become satisfying, if it is to serve as an outlet for our enthusiasms. It is no accident that the backbone of each of these movements is furnished by the enthusiasm of the young people to whom they make their appeal.

In terms of our present discussion the common element in communism and Hitlerism is that each provides its adherents with a distinctive way of life. Can the same be said of democ-

racy? Rule by the majority is a method of settling conflicts of opinion; it does not provide opinions. When policies are needed for dealing with problems, the principle of majority rule gives no indication as to what kind of policies are needed. Even if we make the idea of democracy include the doctrine that men are "free and equal" we are not much better off. When are men "free" and when are they "equal"? If freedom means absence of restraint, then the demand for freedom means that there should be no legislation or control of any kind. If equality means that all differences among men should be ignored, then musicians may be put in charge of surgical operations and presidents may be chosen by drawing slips of paper out of a hat. Freedom must be achieved inside of a system of social control and not outside of it; and equality must mean the appropriate recognition of individual differences within the framework of social life. But what kind of social control and framework does this require? In other language, what is the distinctively democratic way of life? As compared with these other points of view, democracy is lacking in definiteness of purpose.

It tends to substitute sentimentalities about freedom and equality and the brotherhood of man for a clear-cut program of action.

This indictment of democracy can be carried still further. Even if democracy had a respectable notion of what it wants, which appears not to be the case, would it not still lack the proper organization for achieving its ends? In specific situations the democratic programs would have to run the gantlet of parliamentary procedures before it could be converted into action. The operations of these procedures are all too familiar. Vested interests of all kinds are generally able to emasculate legislation which is unfriendly to them. Consequently, democracy, as someone has said, easily becomes "anonymous tyranny." In times like these, so it may be argued, when a nation's future, and perhaps even its very existence, require firm and united action, democracy is out of place. When the house is on fire, direct action is called for, and not a meeting for the purpose of discussing what, if anything, is to be done about it.

But even this criticism does not go to the heart of the matter. A way of life is the expres-

sion of a person's deepest convictions; it embodies his total estimate or size-up of the meaning of things. So, while he may be considerate of others who hold different views, he cannot make compromises with them. Compromises would mean a betrayal of basic principle.\* Hence the acceptance of a way of life seems to commit us to the principle of dictatorship. It is entirely plausible to argue that tolerance is a virtue only so long as it does not constitute a danger to the fundamental way of life. A political movement which seeks to impose a distinctive way of life upon a nation cannot afford to be tolerant of those who are in opposition. Critics must be "liquidated," or at any rate they must be silenced. The idea of democracy suggests that discussion be permitted of things which are not really open to discussion. If democracy represented a distinctive way of life it would presumably be less tolerant of critics. Criticism is in order only as long as it is "constructive," *i.e.*, as long as it serves the purpose

\* "Political parties are inclined to compromises; *Weltanschauungen* never. Political parties take account of their opponents; *Weltanschauungen* proclaim their infallibility." Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, p. 507. In the present connection the term "*Weltanschauung*" may be taken as equivalent to "way of life."



of forwarding and improving the general policies that are already under way. As to basic doctrines and policies, the government will not brook criticism or opposition. This is equally true in Russia and in Germany.

In such reasoning, however, we must not lose sight of the fact that the purpose of a dictatorship is not merely to achieve certain objective ends, but also to establish a "way of life," *i.e.*, to make over the psychology of the people in conformity with an antecedent pattern. This new psychology, moreover, is necessary in order to give to government the backing of public opinion. Even the most autocratic government must have such backing if it is to survive. As Talleyrand once remarked, "a government can do anything with bayonets, except sit on them." \* Consequently, dictatorships are not content to suppress hostile views. They also make careful provision for a continuous process of "conditioning" the public mind. This takes the form of a never-ceasing bombardment of the public mind, which comes from all directions and through all manner of agencies, but particularly

\* Quoted by John Dewey in *Democracy and Education*, p. 97.

through the press and through the system of public education.

Such use of education, indeed, is not in itself anything new. In principle it is as old as the hills. One might even argue with considerable plausibility that education as a process of systematic indoctrination is the only kind of education with which the course of civilization has made us thoroughly familiar. Generally speaking, the purpose of schools has always been to transmit, besides certain skills and information, a selected assortment of attitudes and beliefs, in order to make sure that the younger generation will grow up in accordance with an antecedent philosophy or way of life. The early settlers in New England, for example, turned their attention to education as soon as circumstances permitted, for the avowed purpose of perpetuating their way of life among succeeding generations. Religious organizations have always done this as a matter of course. Governments likewise have always kept a watchful eye on the schools. Systems of education are necessarily and inevitably bound up with some way of life. Dictatorships simply give emphasis to this fact. We are

startled and concerned by this emphasis, perhaps, partly because they are so thorough about it and partly because active interference by the government gives prominence to the element of compulsion.

In every case such interference takes the form of prescribing the specific results which education must achieve. These results may relate to attitudes or values or they may have to do with questions of fact. The government may require that youngsters become imbued with enthusiasm for a classless society and with scorn or contempt for the profit motive, or it may require fruits in the form of pride in nationalism and unquestioning loyalty to a distinctive Kultur. It may go further and decide by decree what is or is not to be regarded as a fact. It may be demanded of obedient schoolmasters, for example, that the biological question of heredity *versus* environment be handled either to show that race or breed is unimportant and that all men are fundamentally alike, or that it is all-important and therefore the only sound basis for determining the religion, the art, the legal system and the foreign policy of a nation. It may be de-

*manded that religion be presented as an outworn superstition or that it be regarded as the expression of divine sanction for nationalistic aims. And with adequate governmental backing, education can be surprisingly efficient in delivering goods according to specifications.*

To a person bred in the "democratic" tradition, such a system of education is likely to seem intolerable. A cynic might say that this is because the person who objects is himself a perfect product of just the kind of education which he condemns. He has been taught that certain things are "democratic" while others are not, and the fact that the method by which he was taught is largely the same quite escapes his notice. The chief difference, so our cynic might argue, is that in countries which imagine themselves to be democratic the hand of dictatorship is concealed in a velvet glove. Of Great Britain, for example, it is said that teachers

are obliged to adopt, as the basis of their instruction of their pupils, and even of their intimate conversations with them, the fundamental conceptions of the national civilization, such as constitutional monarchy, parliamentary democracy, British Imperialism, the cap-

italist organization of industry, and a conventional Christianity. In no part of the country could a teacher in a public elementary school keep his (or her) job, however sincere and fervent his belief, if he was known to inculcate atheism, communism, the abolition of parliament, republicanism, or the dissolution of the British Empire. Indeed, dismissal would probably follow any open propaganda of such opinions even outside the school. The teaching staffs in the endowed and so-called "public" schools have little, if any, more freedom of opinion in this respect than those in the elementary school service. Even professors and lecturers in the British universities find it prudent, at least until they attain outstanding eminence in their several subjects, to abstain from public expression of any of their opinions on fundamental issues that run counter to the prevalent orthodoxy.\*

If we grant, as we must, that conditions in the United States are substantially the same in this respect as in Great Britain, we may proceed to sum up the case. First of all, the concept of democracy cannot be limited to majority rule, but must furnish a guiding principle for the formulation of national policy. In our present terminology, it must signify a way of life. It

\* Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilization?* Vol. II, p. 1029, Charles Scribner's Sons. Quoted with permission of the publishers.

does contain the promise and potency of becoming a way of life, as is evidenced by the importance that is attached to "freedom" and "equality." So far, however, the implications of the concept of democracy have not been developed to become a guiding philosophy for the common man and for our schools. With respect to the schools, we have not yet made it clear that a democratic school is or can be substantially different in method or spirit from any other kind of school. Schools represent basic philosophies, and basic philosophies apparently do not admit of compromise. Calvinism cannot compromise with Rousseauism; historic Christianity cannot compromise with paganism; government by divine right cannot compromise with government "of the people." If democracy represents a way of life, and if ways of life do not admit of compromise, how can there be tolerance, in school or out? But first it is necessary to raise the previous question and consider the meaning of democracy as a basic philosophy in order to determine whether it has a distinctive quality for the organization of society and for the organization and management of the schools.

## CHAPTER II

### THE EARLIER CONCEPT OF DEMOCRACY

A FRONTAL attack on the complex problem of democracy requires both extraordinary equipment and extraordinary courage. So far as the American scene is concerned, an easier and more promising approach is to consider the conditions or circumstances in which the American tradition of democracy originated. Since conditions were relatively simple at the outset, it is correspondingly easier to ascertain what democracy meant at the time, which prepares the way for a consideration of the reinterpretation that must be made in order to adapt the idea of democracy to the requirements of our own day and age.

A significant clew for this approach is offered

us in the curious and persistent distrust of government which runs all through American history and colors the whole course of its development. Some form of government was indeed a recognized necessity, since provision had to be made for the security of life and property. But there was always the apprehension that government would overstep its proper boundaries, and the danger that this might happen was supposed to vary directly with the square of the distance to the place from which the authority of government emanated. Consequently, safety lay in keeping the government as close as possible to the people. Local self-government and state rights became watchwords which reflected the dread of concentrated power. The extent of this dread may be inferred from the system of checks and balances embodied in the Constitution, and from Thomas Jefferson's statement that it would be desirable to have a revolution every twenty years in order that no government might become too securely intrenched. An authority on American government describes this early attitude in the following language:



Not only is government the servant of the people, but it is an untrustworthy and unreliable servant. It cannot be given a free hand in caring for the affairs of its master, on the contrary it must be limited in many ways; it must be checked at every possible point; it must be at all times under suspicion. Otherwise it will cease to be servant and take the place of the master. Too much emphasis cannot well be laid upon the fear which the "Fathers" had of government. To them the great lesson of history was that government always tends to become oppressive and that it is the greatest foe of individual liberty.\*

Presumably this attitude toward government was the expression of a reaction against governmental interference in those countries from which the early colonists had emigrated. At any rate, the earlier Americans seemed determined to keep the management of their affairs in their own hands, and to leave as little as possible to governmental authority. In the ordinary community there were, indeed, certain individuals, such as the constable and the justice of the peace, who represented the majesty of the law. But the local functionary owed his office to the votes of his neighbors, and the majesty which he repre-

\* C. E. Merriam, *American Political Theories*, p. 76.

sented was seriously impaired by the fact that he was known to everybody as "Jim" or "Bill." Moreover, his duties were usually of a routine, and more or less formal character. The really potent controls were of a non-governmental and extra-legal kind. These we may designate for the moment as social controls.

The character and the operation of these social controls naturally varied in different localities. They might relate to matters of race relationships, or to the regulation of religious or political opinion, or to private conduct, or to anything that the community chose to consider offensive. Judgments were rendered in terms of the standards or patterns which happened to prevail in the given community. These controls varied all the way from cold ostracism to acts of violence. Local sentiment might compel an offender to confess his sins in church; it might decree that negroes should not be permitted to take up residence in the community; it might inflict corporal punishment on a man for mistreating his wife or children, or for some other violation of the moral code; it might throw out of town an unwelcome speaker or organizer, it

might secure the dismissal of a teacher who did not conform to the *status quo*. These pressures were exerted through the church, through chambers of commerce, through Rotary and Kiwanis clubs, through lodges and labor unions, through organizations like the Ku Klux Klan, the Night Riders, and the Black Legion, or through mob action. Not infrequently they were exercised in ways that may be properly labeled to-day either as downright tyranny or as unjustifiable prying into private affairs. As a man once complained: "It is getting so in this community that a widower cannot even get his shoes shined without having all the neighbors say that he might have waited a while longer."

Similar complaints were doubtless made by many others. As a rule, however, the restrictions thus placed upon the individual, even though they might be arbitrary or accidental, were accepted in the same unquestioning way that one accepts the weather or the contour of the landscape. One reason for this, presumably, was that these controls were generated within the community itself and did not represent an authority reaching in from the outside. The re-

strictions were accepted with tolerably good grace because the individual felt himself to be a part of the community by which he was controlled. The difference is perhaps roughly analogous to the difference between being ordered about by a policeman and being ordered about by one's wife. The community, after all, was his own community; he had a share in its life, in its affairs and purposes, and he shared on a basis of equality with everybody else. Generally speaking, the obstructions to such sharing, through inequalities of social and economic status, were relatively small. In a sense, therefore, he was a free citizen in a free community. As long as the controls were exercised by the community and did not come from the outside, it was possible to maintain the fiction that personal freedom had suffered no infringement at all. This was possible, not because of any extraordinary talent for self-deception, but because of an inarticulate feeling that personal freedom, when it collided too openly with community sentiment, was not really freedom but just plain "orneriness" and subversiveness. This attitude carried with it the unrecognized assumption that

there is something more basic than personal freedom, *viz.*, the freedom, not of the individual, but of the community, to work out its own destiny, without interference from the outside. This freedom of the community, together with equality of status for individuals as members of the community, expresses fairly accurately the historical meaning of American democracy.

It is true that in the popular conception of democracy more emphasis is placed on the freedom of the individual than on the freedom of the community. One reason for this is perhaps the influence of the pioneer tradition. Those who ventured far out into new territory were scarcely subject to control of any kind. This was particularly true of the breed that never permitted civilization to catch up with them. They were always to be found in the advance guard of the western movement, and they felt crowded if there were any neighbors within a radius of ten miles or if the gunshots of other hunters could be heard by them in the wilderness. A second reason is that the framework or pattern set by the community often permitted so much

latitude for self-expression that this feature obscured the factor of control. The individual's right of self-determination was recognized and respected and even encouraged. In the language of the vernacular, he was his own boss. He was expected to shift for himself, to meet everyone else as an equal, to be the architect of his own fortune. These circumstances tended to minimize the element of control and to generate an exaggerated tradition of personal freedom. They also produced a type of American characterized by a highly developed sense of self-reliance and personal initiative, together with a strong disposition to take chances, and with a childlike lack of class consciousness; a type of which Kipling said:

He greets the embarrassed gods, nor fears  
To shake the iron hand of Fate.  
Or match with Destiny for beers.

As was intimated a moment ago, these free Americans were not really as free as they imagined. Freedom, in the sense of absence of constraint, was achieved to a much greater degree

by the community than by the individual. The difference was made inconspicuous, however, by the fact that the individual, like the community, was largely exempt from governmental control, and by the further fact that control through community patterns was not explicitly recognized as a curtailment of personal freedom. If the patterns of a particular community were not to a person's liking, it seemed reasonable to assume that he should find some other community where he would be better suited. The finality of community patterns was taken for granted. This assumption gave a certain simplicity to the whole scheme. It identified democracy with certain methods or procedures—more especially political procedures—within the community framework. Hence, democracy was not an ideal to be struggled for, but a possession which had already been achieved. It identified freedom with absence of governmental regulation. It was not disturbed by any sense of serious conflict between personal freedom and social control, provided that this control was not exercised by governmental agencies. The assumption with regard to the finality of community pat-

terns served as a screen which prevented the shortcomings of these conceptions from becoming too painfully visible. In spite of its limitations, however, this general scheme suited the circumstances fairly well. It formed the background for the sentiments and emotions which had as their watchwords "liberty" and "equality of opportunity," and which became deeply embedded in the American tradition of democracy.

This general attitude is quite understandable. Looked at from the vantage-point of the twentieth century, however, an embarrassing question is likely to obtrude itself. How, as a matter of hard, cold fact, does a democracy of this kind differ from the dictatorships of Europe? The question is embarrassing because, superficially at any rate, the resemblance between them seems to outweigh the differences. In both cases we find ourselves confronted with a comprehensive scheme of values, with an integrated way of life. In both cases, furthermore, this scheme of values is enforced in a way that shows no exaggerated sensitiveness to the "individual liberty" and the "equality" which we love to talk about. It is true that the dictatorship of the local com-



munity was not exercised chiefly, or even primarily, through legal agencies. It is also true that there was no single pattern for belief and conduct for the whole country and that it was possible for an individual to select a congenial community in which to live, and thus escape to a large degree from the sense of compulsion and regimentation. Perhaps we may also grant, for good measure, that the regimentation exercised by a local community was not as extensive as that of a dictatorship, so that the average person actually enjoyed more liberty in important matters. But when all these concessions are made, it is not clear that this historic conception of democracy represents a real contribution to the world's thinking on the subject of social organization. It seems to boil down to the conclusion that a people living chiefly under rural conditions and not seriously threatened by foreign enemies can afford to take its dictatorship in small doses and in a great variety of forms.

## CHAPTER III

### THE INADEQUACY OF THE EARLIER CONCEPT

**W**HATEVER its defects, democracy, as understood and practiced by the American people in the past, seemed fairly well suited to the conditions of the times. These earlier conditions, however, proved to be of a transient character. With the increase in population and the advance of science and technology, conditions arose which led to the breakdown of the old-time community and to a significant change in the status of government. As the country became industrialized and urbanized, governmental activities necessarily became more numerous and more important. Fire hazards, building inspection, health measures, schools, the regulation of hours and conditions of labor—these and a host of other matters required governmental control. Moreover, prob-

lems constantly arose which transcended the boundaries of local communities. The regulation of railroads and other monopolies, for example, or the inspection of foods and drugs, or the conservation of resources, or the control of flood areas—to mention only a few—could hardly be left to the determination of local communities. This growing intrusion of regulation from the outside was inescapable, despite the prejudice against such regulation. These changes found expression in the development of facilities for transportation and communication which destroyed the isolation and self-sufficiency of the old-time community and thus changed the basic conditions of living.

At first sight it might be supposed that this change was simply a process of entrusting to the government a variety of functions which under earlier conditions were either not required at all or else were performed by the local community. There is, however, an important difference. Within wide limits a community could manage its affairs as it might see fit. It could control the teaching in its schools along such lines as it chose; it could regulate opinion and conduct

within its own boundaries; it could provide assistance to those who needed it according to its own conceptions of right and justice. In the language employed previously, the community had certain patterns of behavior; it embodied a way of life. On the other hand, the government was not supposed to represent anything like a total scheme for living. The original conception of government, which limited its functions, in the main, to the protection of life and property, was carried over, more or less inarticulately, despite the new conditions. There was no adequate realization of the fact that as the government increased its scope of action, it also, by implication, widened its theoretical basis. A government which prescribes what is to be taught in the schools and which excludes communists from its borders is not merely protecting life and property; it constitutes itself the guardian of a social creed. A government which levies tariffs and taxes, which legislates with respect to strikes and labor unions, which regulates commerce and banking, which places the resources of the national treasury behind private enterprises, and which assumes responsibility for providing relief

for the unemployed—a government which does all these things is not merely doing police duty on a large scale. It is actively taking sides on behalf of some conception of social organization and in opposition to other conceptions. It must decide, for example, whether the rights of property include the right to maintain an “open shop,” whether the government should invade the field of private enterprise, whether large concentrations of wealth are for the public good, whether “dollar diplomacy” with respect to foreign policy should be maintained. In brief, the government finds itself on the road toward the same kind of absolutism which was formerly exercised by the local community. But this substitution of the government for the community is precisely what was formerly condemned as dictatorship and tyranny.

Such a complete reversal of position obviously requires a reinterpretation of the function of government. The line of least resistance, however, was to ignore the need of such reinterpretation by maintaining the fiction that the government functions merely as the guardian of our liberties and not as the interpreter of them. The

result is endless intellectual confusion. It is doubtful whether the American people were ever so lacking in a sense of direction as they are at the present time. Their tradition is everlastingly at war with itself. The government must maintain the principle of free competition, but it must avoid the "regimentation" of business which such maintenance requires. It must respect freedom of speech and of conscience, but it must suppress "un-American" ideas and practices. It must protect labor, but it must not curtail freedom of contract. It must provide social security, but it must be careful not to teach the people to lean on the government. It must maintain a large navy to protect American rights in all parts of the earth, but it must not depart from the policy of isolationism.

A situation of this kind obviously constitutes a special invitation to vested interests and seekers after special privilege. They have managed to set the pattern so as to protect property rights at the expense of other rights, while pretending to maintain the old-time democracy as embodied in the "American system." The trick lies in ignoring the fact that democracy in this modern

world cannot be identified with any one "right" to the exclusion of all other rights, but in a certain reinterpretation or reintegration of all of them. The average citizen senses the fact that something is wrong, but he is usually unable to figure out just how the rabbit was taken from the hat. The arguments that he hears do not produce intellectual clarity because the issue remains obscure. Almost any new proposal can be advocated on the ground that it is required for the protection of American rights, or it can be opposed on the ground that it involves an indefensible extension of governmental functions. Or, in a pinch, the writers of political platforms may do both. As long as there is no suspicion that the whole conception of government and of democracy needs to be revised, political argument easily degenerates into sleight-of-hand. In the end our average citizen is likely either to invoke a plague on the whole business or else to be governed by habit, prejudice, and personal interest, and let it go at that.

Such a state of affairs obviously has its dangers. So far, indeed, democracy is still the dominant tradition. It is not exposed to any serious

danger from the outside. Within the country there is no formidable body of opinion to challenge the principle of democracy. On the contrary, the most divergent proposals with respect to policy all make their appeal to the sacred principle of democracy. But in proportion as democracy is used, like the mantle of charity, to cover every variety of sin, the whole concept loses its significance, and eventually the reference to democracy will become nothing more than a gesture of respect for the dead. Does this concept contain within itself the promise and potency of a vital guiding principle for the conduct of our national life? Basically, this is the only question that really matters to the American people. Our safety lies in facing the issue, instead of avoiding it. As President Roosevelt said in his speech of acceptance, "the American people have a rendezvous with destiny." As a matter of sheer self-preservation, we cannot afford to fail that rendezvous.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE MEANING OF "FREE AND EQUAL"

UP TO this point our chief concern has been to draw a sharp contrast between the initial conception of government as an institution for the performance of police functions and the actual necessities which confront a modern government. To state it differently, the contrast has been drawn between a social order in which local communities determined their own patterns for living and a social order in which this determination becomes increasingly an obligation for which government must assume responsibility. As background for this contrast reference has been made to European dictatorships, which avowedly undertake to determine the basic pattern or way of living through governmental agencies. The charge has been brought that in

practice we have been of necessity doing the same thing, albeit in a halting and piecemeal fashion, while we repudiate this in theory; and that protestations of loyalty to democracy eventually must become downright hypocrisy and camouflage if we persist in the refusal to recognize the discrepancy between theory and practice.

It is now time to consider in more detail the distinctive quality given to American life by the ideas of freedom and equality, and also the problems generated thereby. As a rule the character of the circumstances in which these earlier communities were placed was such as to confer a certain equality of status upon the members of the group. Differences in status and authority, due to birth, breeding or inherited wealth, were, in the main, relatively inconspicuous. Consequently, the term democracy took on certain connotations which were not primarily political or governmental in character. The individual possessed liberty, which did not in the least mean that he could do as he pleased but that no individual persons were placed in positions of authority over him. By the same token he also pos-

sessed equality. He was "free and equal" as a member of his community, privileged to share in the way of life maintained by the community on equal terms with everybody else. As was stated previously, the chief function of government was to see to it that this happy arrangement was not disturbed from the outside. As the functions of government became more extensive, however, there was a growing danger that they might become a menace to freedom and equality. Consequently, it became increasingly important to insist that government must go about its business in such a way as to maintain "equality before the law."

At the outset this phrase meant primarily that government must maintain certain standards of equality with respect to the right to vote and to hold office and that there must be no arbitrary discriminations for or against specific individuals on the part of those in authority. In the course of time these standards were applied more widely, as in the extension of suffrage to the colored race and to women. But in addition to this the pressure of circumstances also compelled applications of a different kind. In a world such

as ours "equality" becomes an empty term unless definite responsibility is assumed in matters like health, public education, and the regulation of big business. That an active responsibility of this kind constitutes progress no one would deny. But that it introduces a certain vagueness into our political thinking seems equally clear. It can hardly be claimed that we are seriously aiming at equality in these matters. Not only that, but we seem to have lost track of what "free and equal" means in such connections. The meaning of "free and equal" in its application to community living presented no practical difficulty. It referred to the status of membership in the community, to the right of participation on even terms in those affairs which the community held in common. In its later applications, however, this idea of participation or of common interests fades out of the picture. The requirements of health are supposed to be satisfied if our population can enjoy the ruggedness of a colt. The requirements of education are supposed to be satisfied if young people have the mental equipment to adjust themselves to their physical and social environment. The requirements of eco-

nomie justice are supposed to be satisfied if every person has the opportunity to maintain for himself a decent standard of living. This is done in the name of freedom and equality, but it is not apparent that the results are judged in terms of participation in common interests or concerns. They are certainly not judged in terms of economic equality, since a criterion of this kind would turn our whole economic and industrial system upside down.

In some way or other we must make our peace with the notion of "free and equal." It lies too near the heart of what we mean by democracy to be ignored or slurred over. As was said a moment ago, this phrase had a reasonably satisfactory meaning in its day. This meaning, unfortunately, is not adequate for us. Community life in its earlier form is on its way out. Moreover, there is room for the suspicion that it was really based on dictatorship—not of an autocrat, or of the proletariat, but of the community. There was freedom and equality, if you will, inside the basic pattern or way of life maintained by the particular community. But the pattern itself had a certain fixity or immutability, which character-

izes dictatorships of whatever kind and which is not easily reconciled with the idea of a genuine democracy. How, then, did it happen, if our early democracy was founded on dictatorship, that this fact was so successfully kept out of sight? In our tradition of democracy there seems to be no recognition of any such thing. We hold that all men are created free and equal and that all are entitled to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; with no strings attached. In the ordinary dictatorship the mailed fist is constantly in evidence. In our own case we seem to have been unable to see it, even when it was thrust into our faces. In other words, we have succeeded in playing up one element in the situation and playing down the other so as to emerge with the conviction that our democracy is a complete antithesis to dictatorship.

This conviction is too much diluted with error to warrant the self-complacency which is exhibited by the average American, yet it contains an element of truth. Since there was no single pattern for belief and conduct to which all the people were required to conform, the idea of freedom and equality became dissociated from all

connection with patterns and so was cultivated as an absolute value, even though it was not thus dissociated in fact. Moreover, the diversity of patterns created both the need and the disposition to accept something less than the rigid conformity which is ordinarily demanded by dictatorships. Consequently, there was a genuine difference in psychology. Lastly, the multiplicity of communities and the mobility of the American people tended to locate individuals in communities that were congenial to them, so that the restriction was scarcely felt. The limitation on belief and conduct was there, but its yoke was easy and its burden was light. By comparison it is only when diversities of belief are considerable that the demand for conformity to a common scheme of living is felt as an extraneous compulsion and an invasion of liberty. Moreover, a like-minded community does not ordinarily find it necessary to maintain special officials and special agencies to take care of occasional lapses from community standards. That is to say, the average citizen does not find himself constantly in the presence of the visible symbols of an external authority, as in the case of the

ordinary dictatorship. In such circumstances the whole psychological quality of the situation is different from what it would otherwise be.

The standards for the conduct of ladies and gentlemen in the *ante bellum* South are a case in point. These standards were certainly rigid, and they could not be violated with impunity, even when good sense would have so decreed. Ladies had to faint, duels had to be fought, extravagant standards of hospitality had to be maintained. There was no easy escape from these standards; but what made their authority so final was the fact that the average person whom they concerned did not want to escape. They were bred into the bone, and social pressure was likely to have the inward assent of the person to whom it was applied. A tradition may be hidebound to almost any degree without necessarily creating a feeling of tyranny on the part of those who are victimized by it. Since the tradition belongs to the way of life that has been accepted, conformity to it and active assistance in maintaining it is experienced, not as domination, but as freedom. Like the atmosphere we breathe, it creates no feeling of pressure but a sense of liberation.



With this background we can easily understand both the fear of governmental interference and the curious insensitiveness, in this land of vaunted freedom, to acts of coercion and violence in the suppression of nonconformists. In a dim and unformulated way the community patterns were not regarded as limitations of personal freedom but as instrumentalities for achieving freedom. The essence of freedom lay, not in the lack of restraint, but in the character or quality of the restraint. A person became free by accepting the patterns and acting accordingly; by making restraint self-imposed and internal, instead of being a prescription by an external authority. Consequently, the violation of these patterns was not regarded as an assertion of personal freedom, but as an attack on the whole basis of freedom. To use a term that has been made familiar during recent years, such violation was deemed "subversive," and to tolerate it was regarded not as a virtue but as a vice.

This attitude has a certain undeniable logic. Philosophers tell us that a person is not free merely because there is no restraining influence to keep him from acting on any stray suggestion

or impulse. As William James remarked, a baby is not free, but is owned and controlled by his environment. He becomes free in proportion as he can hold in abeyance his immediate reactions and modify them in the light of relevant considerations. A man who feels that he has been insulted, for example, may strike the offending person, or challenge him to a duel, or seek to avenge himself through business channels; or he may decide to ignore the insult, or even to turn the other cheek. In so far as the final action is the outcome of reflection, it is obviously an expression of his standards of value or his "way of life." The act is then a free act, in the only intelligible meaning of the word "free." But freedom is made possible by the fact that there is a "frame of reference" or "way of life" in terms of which the matter in hand can be judged. Otherwise there is nothing to go by and our reactions become random and blind. This helps us to understand the paradox that dictatorships claim to be roads to freedom.\* It also indicates why people are reluctant to give up old and familiar patterns. To revise basic patterns is no

\* Cf. A. Rosenberg, *Der Mythos des XX. Jahrhunderts*, p. 111.

easy task. It is much more tempting to complain that we don't know what the world is coming to, and to regard innovators as persons who from ignorance or malice take a delight in disturbing the peace.

In brief, there is a world of difference between conformity to a standard because there is in the background the menace of a club and conformity because the thing to which we conform belongs to a frame of reference which we accept and use as a means for the organization of thought and conduct. In Bobby Burns' language:

The fear o' hell's a hangman's whip  
To haud the wretch in order;  
But where ye feel your honour grip,  
Let that aye be your border.

An unsympathetic critic might reply that the difference is the difference between a wretch who is motivated by fear and a wretch who has been taught to kiss the rod. But it is more than that. We may concede without reservation that tradition and ignorance and thickheadedness may constitute a fearsome bondage. Nevertheless, we have here a clew as to how freedom may

be acquired. If we start with the premise that our "frame of reference" or "way of life" furnishes the tools for the application of intelligence to conduct, then the problem of making conduct increasingly intelligent becomes the problem of escaping from the limitations which are imposed by our "way of life" the moment we insist or take for granted that this way of life must not be subjected to any change. The refusal of Charles I to accept any limitation of the divine right of kings; the obedience to orders by the Light Brigade, even though it was obvious that "someone had blundered"; the acceptance of the dictum that a man must not marry, in any circumstances, outside of his "class"; the insistence that "debts of honor" must be paid ahead of the debts owing to the butcher and the grocer; the obligation to carry on a senseless family feud; the resistance to economic changes because these are not in line with the "American System"; the refusal to pay any heed to the deliverances of science where these conflict with theological creed—all these are instances of an unquestioning, and sometimes even heroic, submission to a sacrosanct scheme of things when a

wider sensitiveness to human values would seem to be more in accordance with good sense.

Even if this be conceded, however, we are not out of the woods. What constitutes proper sensitiveness to human values? Some guiding principle is needed. The extreme opposite to domination by a fixed scheme of things is blind revolt, the disposition to regard all change as inherently good, which is perhaps even less intelligent. How are we to differentiate between changes which are good and changes which are bad?

The issue can now be sharply drawn. If judgments of good and bad, of right and wrong, must be made in terms of an antecedent "frame of reference," in the sense of a fixed scheme or creed, then the principle of dictatorship is vindicated, and democracy is plausible only because its basic absolutism is kept from view. The only liberty that is then permitted is liberty within the law, as laid down by absolutism. On the other hand, if there is no absolute standard of judgment, then our judgments must be made in terms of participation in common interests, regardless of other considerations. Conduct on the part of communities or of individuals must be

evaluated with reference to its effect on promoting common interests among men. Liberty grows as the area of common interests is widened. Democracy then becomes identified with this principle of relativity, as contrasted with the absolutism of dictatorships. There is no middle ground.

From the standpoint of democracy the fact that a community is a community of interests and purposes is the most important thing about it. This sharing of interests is the indispensable condition for achieving a level of development above that of the brutes. Eighteenth-century writers sometimes talked as though a life apart from the corrupting influences of our fellow men and directed entirely by the benign forces of "nature" would insure ideal human development. Sociologists tell us, however, that children who, through some quirk of circumstance, grow up without human companionship remain permanently on a subhuman level. As far as the development of capacity is concerned, any form of human association, no matter how degraded, is better than none. Such association inevitably means development of capacity, even if this de-

velopment is lopsided or misdirected. Degradation occurs if certain possible forms of sharing are left unutilized, with the result that the corresponding capacities become atrophied. Habit and custom may prevent the development of shared interests, as among savages; the deliberate imposition of fixed credos may destroy what has already been achieved, as in the case of dictatorships of whatever kind. Any such imposition means that individual men and women are being used as a means to some extraneous end; that, in short, they are being started on the road toward degradation. The end that is set up may be the glory of God or the glory of race or the glory of empire or the glory of a tradition or what not; the final result is the same. No such end has any value except in so far as it increases our capacity for sharing in common concerns and thus contributes to human freedom. All creeds and social organizations are means to an end, and this end lies inside the process of living together and working together; it is not located on a far-off mountaintop created by an iridescent dream. The kingdom of heaven is within us, within the everyday lives of a toiling, sweating

humanity. A democracy which fails to recognize this fact cannot hope to escape a certain degree of unconscious hypocrisy, of a holier-than-thou attitude toward other forms of social organization. It is at this point that the issue is joined.

What, then, becomes of the function of government? It can neither limit itself to police functions nor can it undertake to determine beforehand what the social pattern is to be. It can, however, devote itself to the task of providing the conditions for widening the area of common purposes among men. It cannot recognize the finality of any cherished tradition or belief, but must insist that every interest must take account of all the others. It would see in industry, for example, an opportunity to go beyond the profit motives of the employers and of the employees, and to make industry a means for the realization of other ends which employers and employees might hold in common. In the field of international relations it would adopt the policy of being a good neighbor, which would be definitely away from both imperialism and isolationism. In the field of domestic affairs it would shape legislation in such matters as marriage and



divorce and birth control toward the end of promoting a social order centering on the cultivation of common interests and purposes, and not in conformity with the deliverances of church or creed. In public education it would take the position that the purpose is not to carry on propaganda, but to clarify the issue between democracy and absolutism. It would set no patterns, but it would seek to facilitate the continuous remaking of patterns in the interests of a common life.

The implications of this point of view are tremendous and far-reaching. Democracy as thus conceived is no longer a name for compartmentalized political beliefs but becomes a point of view that cuts across the whole mass of our traditional beliefs and habits. It calls for a reconstruction of beliefs and standards in every major field of human interest and thus takes on the universality of philosophy and of religion, which is to say that it becomes a generalized or inclusive way of life. As contrasted with the dictatorships of the present day, it offers, not merely an unctuous gospel of good will and tolerance, but a rival philosophy for the organization of social

and personal conduct. This rival philosophy is distinctive in that it does not undertake to set predetermined metes and bounds for beliefs and for purposes, but rather provides a basic principle by which these are to be judged. To have life and to have it more abundantly becomes a matter, not of conformity to any final standard, but of continuous growth in the capacity to lift this principle of common interests and purposes out of its various and everchanging contexts and to make it the basis of a consistent way of life.

## CHAPTER V

### DEMOCRACY IN A MODERN WORLD

THOUGHTFUL observers everywhere seem to agree in the conclusion that our civilization is afflicted with a deep-seated malady. Our old patterns of living are obviously breaking down. Our economic system is hardly more than a sorry makeshift. International relations everywhere are constantly creating the threat of future wars which nobody wants. Organized religion is steadily losing its authority and influence. The younger generation in democratic countries has no adequate standards for conduct and no adequate objects of loyalty. There is no appropriate outlet for the idealism and enthusiasm which is natural to youth. But instead of probing for basic causes we continue to live by our habits. We keep putting new wine into old bottles by such devices as increasing the social

emphasis in religion, by preaching the gospel of a New Deal in economic matters and by promoting new treaties and covenants among nations. What is needed is a re-examination of values, a new orientation.

Whatever the shortcomings of present-day dictatorships may be, they at least have the merit of recognizing this fact. Not only so, but they contain elements of real and permanent value. Within circumscribed areas they encourage and promote the cultivation of common interests; and in one way or another they impart a realizing sense that the way to save one's life is to learn to lose it in devotion to a social ideal. From a democratic point of view, however, they all suffer from the limitation of needing a common enemy in order to maintain unity within their own ranks. At the present time both communism and Hitlerism use each other as bugaboos. In so doing they perhaps both, but particularly Germany, justify the fears that are created, and thus endanger world peace; which is the price they pay for maintaining unquestioning loyalty among their followers. As someone once said, the ideal of the brotherhood of man would be

achieved most easily if this planet could become involved in a war with some other planet. The same principle applies to smaller groups. The trouble with such brotherhoods is, of course, that they last only for the period of the duration of the war. A war psychology is hardly the appropriate medium for the cultivation of the enduring values of peace. A program like that of Germany, for example, which is based on the concept of race and which treats rights and claims based on this concept as absolute, can hardly fail to keep the dream of world peace on the level of an empty dream. Moreover, even if all danger from without to the concept of race were eliminated and the demand for territorial expansion satisfied, the same kind of psychology would have to be kept alive. To maintain the race idea, biology and history would have to be kept on the rack for the purpose of providing continuous evidence and motivation; certain selected features of ethics, law, science, art and religion would have to be treated as the distinctive products of racial instinct; and any attempt to deviate from this scheme would have to be regarded as a form of treason.

In Russia, likewise, there is indubitably a prevailing wartime psychology. This is, of course, entirely understandable. There are enemies to be guarded against, both without and within the gates. Whether this militant attitude is a permanent and indispensable feature of the program is perhaps less certain. There seems to be some obscurity as to what life is expected to be like after the hated bourgeois exploiter of his fellow men has ceased to be a serious threat. This all-important question seems to be postponed owing to the pressure of present dangers. But meanwhile the mental habits and the methods of dictatorship grow in strength. There will undoubtedly be new discoveries and new problems of such a kind as to change our perspective on old beliefs and old solutions. But how far changes of this kind are to be permitted to go is not altogether clear. It might be supposed, for example, that there will be occasion for extensive revision of accepted ideas about private property, about religion, about moral standards—in short, about the whole present program of the Communist Party. Is this possibility conceded, or is the present scheme assumed to rep-

resent final and immutable truth? Wartime psychology and the pretension of infallibility naturally go hand in hand. Postponement of the question, accordingly, is like postponing preparation for heaven until the end of a life devoted to sin.

Flexibility in social organization is an essential trait of democracy. Manners, as Emerson said somewhere, are just the happy ways of doing things, and this idea is capable of extension all along the line. In academic language, our institutions and practices are patterns which find their excuse for being in the fact that they expedite the business of living. If so, they are subject to modification whenever their way of doing things is no longer the happy way. The institution of private property, for example, has presumably been, on the whole, a happy way of doing things. In some of its modern forms, however, there is little to be happy about. Large-scale organization has widened the gap between the employer and the employee. The thinking and planning are done at one end of the business, while the routine work is done at the other end. Much of what we call progress has resulted

in a kind of spiritual malnutrition for the common man. From our present standpoint real progress obviously lies in the direction of transforming industry so as to make it a means for wider participation. Such a transformation would not be in conformity with a predetermined pattern, but would grow out of the practice of having employers share with their employees and with the public the shaping of the policy by which business is conducted. The primary justification for such a change in practice would not lie in the improvement of service and the more equitable distribution of economic returns—although this result would normally follow—but would consist rather in the remaking of the aims toward which business is directed. Instead of being limited so narrowly to considerations of private profit, these aims would be widened and thus would result in the development of a different psychology in business. In other words, business and industry would become an instrumentality for securing an educational outcome or result. If we generalize this conclusion, we come to the view that all our institutions and practices must justify themselves



on educational grounds. They must assume direct responsibility for the continuous education of all those who participate in them.

It is customary in many quarters to dismiss arguments of this kind as academic pipe-dreaming, emanating from people who have no sense of the practical realities of the business world. It is only too easy to point out objections and difficulties, and to raise the specter of governmental "regimentation" or even of public ownership. With such matters we have no concern at the present moment. It may be conceded cheerfully that the whole conception of private property would have to undergo extensive modification, but with a reminder that history could show other instances where public policy has placed profane hands on the sacred ark of private property. It may be conceded further that the methods for circumventing the difficulties which would inevitably arise are not evident from the start. What does concern us just now is that there is a basic discrepancy between the organization and methods of the business world on the one hand and the requirements of democracy on the other. To accept this situation on the

ground that there is nothing much to be done about it is to say by implication that business is more important than democracy. For some people it doubtless is. For others habit and tradition are too strong. Social patterns have a way of investing themselves with special sanctions and claims and thus becoming fixed and absolute, even if we disregard the fact that they normally become a haven of refuge for special interests, which can be counted on to oppose changes. The fact that these patterns have ceased to be the happy way of doing things is disregarded and so we become oblivious to cleavages in our social life which would otherwise be intolerable.

The world of business and industry is by no means the only instance of the kind. The patterns of personal conduct which suited the conditions of an earlier day have become increasingly unsuited to present circumstances, but they continue to stand between us and the realization that personal conduct in a democracy must have a basis other than prescription and authority. Traditional theology obscures the fact that the content and guiding principles of a rich and

abundant life must come from our social surroundings and not from a remote and supersensuous realm. Traditional patriotism makes us blind to the fact that the great names which we revere were the names of rebels and pioneers in social thinking, and that the vision by which they were inspired and guided is lost when we identify it with the forms through which they sought to achieve its realization.

Even a hasty survey of this kind will perhaps suffice to indicate that the acceptance of the principle of democracy carries with it a disturbing intellectual and moral responsibility. It means the reconstruction of ingrained beliefs and habits, the reshaping of our entire way of life. This undertaking must be accepted as a personal responsibility and cannot be shifted to some obliging dictator. A democratic social order will not undertake to prescribe beliefs, but it clearly cannot ignore the duty of providing assistance in this matter to its members. If it does not provide such assistance it is considerate neither of the individual development of its citizens nor of its own security. The most immediate agency for

this purpose is obviously the public school. A democratic social order which understands its own character and purpose is bound to have a distinctive system of education.

## CHAPTER VI

### TENDENCIES IN AMERICAN EDUCATION

A DEMOCRATIC system of education is ordinarily supposed to mean a system which is made freely accessible to all the members of the group. That it should also be distinctive in quality or content is not taken for granted in the same way. As long as democracy is regarded as a compartmentalized political doctrine, out of relation to other beliefs, it can, at most, be taught only as a separate item, along with the other contents of the curriculum. For a long time democracy itself was hardly a problem for the American people. All the basic questions of democratic government were supposed to have been settled with the framing of the Constitution in 1787. There were recognized defects in govern-

ment, of course—graft and corruption and exploitation of the weak by the strong—but these defects were attributed to the shortcomings of individuals and not to the character of the government itself. Education for democracy consisted for the most part of instruction in the organization and functions of government, together with the cultivation of an attitude of reverence and admiration for our institutions.

It is not surprising, therefore, that American schools experienced no difficulty in modeling themselves after the educational patterns of aristocratic Europe. It did not seem to matter that these patterns embodied a way of life which had its roots in the contrast between master and slave, between lord and peasant. This contrast presupposed an opposition between the spiritual and the material, between the theoretical and the practical, between the cultural and the vocational. Education above the level of practical skills, therefore, was conceived by the aristocrat as having to do with the cultivation of something that he called his "mind," out of all relation to the practical necessities of life. This cultivation was directed toward the acquisition of certain

appreciations in the field of literature and art and philosophy and mathematics and conduct as embodied in the great masterpieces of cultural achievements, commonly designated as the classics. Since there was a long period during which the Europe of the Christian era was poor in such achievements, education turned by preference to antiquity for its models. As a rough characterization we might say that education consisted largely in learning to like what the Greeks liked, to think and feel as they did. Into this general scheme there was injected a thin extract of Christian morals. A gentleman was supposed to show for his inferiors a degree of consideration and kindness which the Greeks would have found it difficult to understand. This additional requirement, however, scarcely affected the general attitude or point of view. Being kind to one's inferiors and dependents is very different from the belief that the social order must be made over so as to open the way for freedom and equality for everybody through the cultivation of common interests and purposes. The whole attitude or scheme of values remained essentially aristocratic; and this attitude was im-

ported into the new world when the Americans took over the European system of education.

We may grant that under the circumstances this was probably inevitable. The earlier Americans were in no position to see clearly the wider implications of the democratic point of view. Moreover, as time went on, these wider implications were constantly being obscured by the fact that educational development showed a surprising capacity for adjusting itself to new demands without departing from its original non-democratic tradition. As modern Europe began to produce high-grade cultural products of its own, in the domain of science, art, literature and history, the dependence on ancient models became less conspicuous and less extensive. The increased emphasis on modern materials seemed to make education more "practical" but it did not automatically bring about a change in the point of view. On the contrary, the doctrine of formal discipline became increasingly an excuse for using this new material so as to perpetuate the selfsame aristocratic conception of culture. Even when the curriculum was widened so as to include "bread-and-butter" subjects, this wid-



ening was not accompanied by any basic change in outlook. The claims of democracy were supposed to be satisfied by a system of public education which—in theory, at any rate—made the resources of education accessible to all those who cared to avail themselves of them.

It was naturally impossible, however, to keep the cloven hoof of aristocracy from showing itself occasionally. The aristocratic tradition, like the political dictators of the present day, stood for a fixed pattern or “way of life,” which in this case was based on the doctrine of a cleavage between the things of the spirit and practical skills. Dead languages were better than living languages; pure science was better than applied science; and “commercial” subjects did not rate at all. In behalf of this point of view traditionalism fought valiantly, though with little success, against the attempt to oust the ancient languages from their preferred position in the curriculum, against the attack on formal discipline, and against the insistence that science be taught chiefly or solely as a means for a “practical” understanding of the environment. All these innovations had their origin in a persistent sense that

education, somehow or other, was too much out of touch with the requirements of everyday living. But they were not guided by a clear perception of the issue that was at stake. Consequently, the reformers won all the battles but did not win the war. In the end the aristocratic tradition still held its main position.

This main position is, in effect, that the true pattern for culture or a good life is not something which man must fashion for himself out of his experiences in trying to subdue a refractory environment to his will, but rather something which has its foundations in cosmic law. Our function, so it was assumed, is to discover the pattern, not to create it. The broad outlines of the pattern were supposed to be discernible in the teachings of history, or in the content of tradition, or in the revealed Word of God, according to individual predilections. In any case the significance of social changes was to be judged, not by any challenge which they may bring to our accepted standards, but by the degree to which they conform or do not conform to these standards. As to these standards themselves, social changes can teach us nothing.

These changes are simply ripples on a tideless sea. Back of the changes lie eternal verities which are the same yesterday, today and forever.

I am inclined to deny that we are living in a period of rapid fundamental changes in the social order. . . . I think there is an immense amount of poppycock talked about the general subject of society and there grow up a lot of glib verbalisms like this social order business which rapidly become stereotyped, and humanity gets into another intellectual vacuum. . . . Nevertheless . . . even granted the pretext of a rapidly changing social order, it is all the more reason why schools should ascertain the eternal verities and teach them. Two and two make four under the New Deal as well as under the Old Deal. The laws of mechanics are the same in Russia and Wall Street. Bad faith makes trouble under any circumstances.\*

In the domain of practical affairs, indeed, a theory of this kind would present an odd appearance. A sculptor would not consider himself much enlightened if he were told that the statue is already contained in the marble and that his job is simply to clip away the superflu-

\* H. C. Morrison, "Comment on The Task of Education in a Period of Rapid Social Change." *Educational Administration and Supervision*, January, 1934.

ous material. A carpenter would have his doubts if he were instructed to build a house, not according to a plan based on the needs and desires of the future occupants, but according to the plan inherent in the building materials. Yet for some reason such advice seems entirely appropriate when it is a question of building, not a house, but an individual character or a social order. Why this should be so is past finding out, unless we assume at the outset that there is nothing in common between practical life and the "life of the spirit." In practical affairs it is quite in order for intelligence to function creatively, but on the "higher" level this is not to be tolerated. The opposition between the two levels is easily understandable in a social order built on slavery or in an age when man's supreme concern was supposed to consist in preparation for a life after death. It has no place in a democracy that is more than a name. As applied to education it means that the principle of dictatorship is made dominant and that the schools become an instrumentality for maintaining the *status quo*.

That this traditionalism is still strongly entrenched in our schools requires no proof. This

is not surprising, since the reform movements in education were directed more against specific shortcomings than against the basic assumption. The scientific movement in education, for example, was inspired more by the remoteness of traditional education from practical application than by hostility to its central position. In its efforts to eliminate waste by the improvement of organization and method it followed the example of scientific management in industry, in which there is no problem of basic purpose at all. In dealing with purposes or aims its primary concern was not to improve these purposes, but to translate them from abstract into concrete and specific terms. Its cheerful willingness to let the selection and content of these purposes be determined by the consensus of opinion of "competent persons" showed only too clearly that it had no convictions of its own. Traditionalism naturally had little to fear from such procedures. Superficially the progressive movement in education was a more serious threat, since it attacked the fundamental assumption or contention that educational processes should be controlled by a set of fixed or eternal values. In fact, however,

this movement did not lead to a rival social philosophy, but spent itself largely in a not altogether healthy cultivation of sweetness and light. In a vague kind of way it was assumed that guiding clews for education could be had from an inspection of the individual pupil. The crucial issue was thus effectively covered up. The choice between deriving guiding principles from an inspection of the universe and deriving them from an inspection of the individual pupil is a choice between the devil and the deep blue sea.

The real question concerns something very different. It is the question of a choice between discovery or inspection on the one hand and invention or creation on the other. As long as this remains obscure, tradition is bound to prevail. The only way we can discover anything by inspection, whether of the universe or of the individual pupil, is to inject into the situation while we are looking the things that tradition has taught us to see. Finding values by inspection is like testing a mine that has been "salted." It is sheer self-delusion to assume that a pupil in a progressive school will automatically achieve a social insight which the school itself does not

possess. Unless or until progressive education emphasizes the wider implications of its position, the doctrine of fixed and immutable values is not likely to be exposed to any serious danger.

The foregoing discussion is not in the least intended as an attempt to discount the value of the contributions that have been achieved during recent decades. Our concern, however, is with the underlying social philosophy. This question has constantly been postponed, for the reason, in part at least, that the American people were complacently unaware of any problem at this point. They have been content to tell themselves and the world in general that they had the best government on earth, and to let it go at that. Spiritual progress, however, does not thrive in an atmosphere of complacency; its first prerequisite is a humble and a contrite heart. Fortunately, the atmosphere is changing. The change in attitude toward social security, for example, is an indication that a different outlook and a different psychology are on the way. Education can promote or it can retard this change. If it is to realize its opportunity, there must be a realization that educational practice which avoids

social theory is at best a trivial thing and at worst a serious obstruction to progress. If we still believe in democracy it is necessary to undertake the arduous task of reorienting ourselves, for the purpose of clarifying our social thinking and reorganizing our educational practices.



## CHAPTER VII

### REORIENTATION IN EDUCATION

**I**T IS agreed on all hands that education is more than just a matter of learning facts and skills. The public interest is poorly served if attitudes and appreciations do not receive at least equal consideration. The things that are learned must translate themselves into terms of emotion and conduct if they are to be significant. Social theory must become a part of the bone and tissue of everyday life if it is to be more than an academic showpiece. In other words, education must make provision for the application of social theory to conduct if it is to escape from futility and frustration. Teaching democracy in the abstract is on a par with teaching swimming by correspondence.

This, however, raises a difficulty. If we grant that the present social order is still dominated

extensively by the aristocratic tradition, it follows that the pupils in our schools, by the mere fact of living in this social order, are being nurtured in attitudes and habits that are incompatible with a genuinely democratic philosophy. The influences by which pupils are surrounded in their out-of-school life and which relate to their beliefs and standards of value are all but overpowering. How, as a matter of sober fact, can the schools hope to combat an enemy of this kind?

The question is not new. Even Plato in the dim and distant past struggled for an answer. The solution at which he arrived was sufficiently extraordinary to be classed as an emergency measure. To rid young people of the attitudes and beliefs which they had already acquired, he recommended the "royal lie." By means of pious and heroic prevarication, so Plato suggested, it is perhaps possible to convince young people that their previous experience never really happened at all, but was just a dream. The slate would then be wiped clean. In the language of physiology, it is supposed that the effects of previous experience can be wiped out of the

nervous system of the pupils through the utterance of certain well-chosen words, and that the schools will then have their chance to build up desirable habits. A procedure of this kind would hardly be considered realistic at the present time. But what is the alternative?

Perhaps there is no completely satisfactory answer to this question, but we must do the best we can. Leaving aside for the moment the problem of what to do about the beliefs and attitudes which the pupil brings with him when he comes to school, we are bound to endorse Plato's insistence that the school must build up the attitudes and appreciations which are appropriate to its underlying philosophy. If this philosophy is a philosophy of democracy, the school must undertake to exemplify, in its organization and procedures, its conception of democratic living. This is necessary, not merely to promote a better intellectual understanding of democracy, but to create the conditions for transforming democratic precepts into established habits of feeling and willing. In brief, the school must be a place where pupils go, not merely to learn, but to carry on a way of life.

For present purposes the character of this way of life is all-important. It is precisely at this point that the progressive movement in education has shown its greatest weakness. It has indeed recognized and emphasized the central fact that learning and doing are knit together in an organic relationship, that education is not merely a preparation for future living but a form of present living. Its conception of present living, however, has been disturbingly obscure. To be significant, a way of life must be the expression of an inclusive outlook on life, of what the Germans call *Weltanschauung*. In the earlier American communities this *Weltanschauung* was embodied in the general patterns which formed the basis of community life. These patterns claimed absolute authority; and in order to escape from this rigidity progressive education had recourse to the device of converting the school into a separate community for the cultivation of a distinctive way of life. In organizing this way of life, however, progressive education has tended to take its clues, not from a distinctive social theory, but from what it conceived to be needs and interests of individual pupils. Or, to put it

differently, it was so concerned to liberate pupils from the domination of dictatorial patterns that it was disposed to regard the elimination of this domination as the chief aim of education. There was no adequate social theory or "frame of reference" for judging and guiding educational procedures, and so ideas inevitably tended to run wild. The reaction against dictatorial regimentation grew into a pious hostility against the whole idea of discipline; interest and freedom became identified with action guided by spontaneous impulse; "social development" was supposed to be achieved by playing up group activities, even to the point of making dependence on the group a substitute for personal development and self-reliance; and continuity of program in the curriculum went by the board for lack of a guiding principle. The undertow was in the direction of making the school, not a way of life, but a combination of clinic and playroom. It is true, of course, that the more sober minds in the movement checked these extravagancies by keeping in view considerations of common sense. But common sense is a name for the ability to maintain perspective, and the question at issue just now is,

not how our perspective is to be maintained, but how it is to be changed and made more adequate.

The shift of emphasis from a one-sided preoccupation with the individual pupil to a concern for promoting a democratic way of life opens up a new approach, since it enables us to deal with education in terms of what community and individual owe to each other. The primary obligation of a democratic community to its members is to provide for each the opportunity to share in the common life according to interest and capacity. This is about what is meant by the doctrine of individual differences. Interest is of major importance as an indication of the road along which the initiation of the pupil into the larger surrounding life may best be achieved. But the concept of interest may never be converted into an excuse for permitting the pupil to ignore his responsibilities as a member of his group. He may not willfully disturb others; he may not be careless in handling school property; he may not permit himself to be undependable in his relations to others.

Obligations of this kind are in principle as binding on the child as they are on the adult.

It is equally true, of course, that in dealing with offenses we must never lose sight of the fact that a child is not an adult. But appropriate "punishment" has a legitimate place. In the main, to be sure, the average young person learns to shape his conduct by reference to a continuously widening circle of experiences and he does so of his own initiative and not from fear of punishment. Instead of spending his pennies, for example, as fast as he acquires them, he learns to resist temptation so as to save them for some great occasion or to help out the family budget. This is "internal control," which is another name for self-discipline and which is at the heart of the educative process. It is no more true, however, of the child than it is of the adult that this is the only kind of discipline which can be tolerated. A willful offender tends to become incapable of seeing his conduct in true perspective if he invariably "gets away with it." Punishment of an appropriate kind enables the offender to see how his conduct is regarded by others, and for this reason it may be highly educative. Perhaps it is pertinent to mention that the Prodigal Son formed an entirely different

opinion of himself after he had been thoroughly "disciplined" by fate. No community has ever been able to get along without taking some measures against those who willfully refuse to see the light. To justify itself punishment must, of course, "fit the crime," and it must be made for the enforcement of a principle which the offender can understand and of which he inwardly approves. If freedom consists in the power of acting with reference to a "widening circle of considerations," then the fact that a person is held to accountability for what he does is not inherently an interference with his freedom but may become a means for the realization of freedom.

The democratic school, in brief, is an institution which aims to promote the ideal of "free and equal" by taking proper account of individual differences and by reliance on the principle of community living. It is an artificial community in the sense that it does not spring up naturally but is created for a special purpose. This distinctive institution is necessary, both because the life outside of the school is too complex to be understood without some kind of



simplification and reorganization, and also because this outside life is very far from being an ideal democratic social order. On the contrary, it tends to promote many beliefs and attitudes which are essentially undemocratic or anti-democratic. The materials of the school are drawn from the surrounding environment; the organization of these materials and the procedures of the school are designed with reference both to the discovery and exploitation of individual capacity and to a continuously deepening sense of membership in the social order. These two elements are indispensable in an educational application of the democratic doctrine that men are created free and equal.

There still remains, however, the problem raised by Plato, *viz.*, how we are to deal with the attitudes and appreciations which are fostered in young people by the life outside of the school. The more we insist on the contrast between adult society and the ideal society within a democratic school, the more serious this problem becomes. If we ignore the problem we are likely to find that pupils will develop two sets of habits, one for the school and one for out-of-

school, pretty much as a businessman may develop different habits for his office and for his club. Many such men would be greatly surprised, and perhaps even offended, if they were expected to show the same courtesy and geniality and generosity toward their employees as they spontaneously exhibit at the club. They would point out promptly that business is not conducted that way. Perhaps it would not even occur to many pupils that the organization of the school is intended to give an indication how the rest of society should be organized. The school in that case becomes a place where people behave in a distinctive way, just as they do in church or at the bathing beach. Unless such an outcome is prevented, the purpose of the school is largely defeated.

To adopt the alternative course by stressing the contrast between the organization of the school and the organization of the outside order likewise has its difficulties. The school in that case becomes a constant and annoying critic of the existing social order. Collisions in every direction become inevitable. To encourage immature pupils in habits of precocious criticism will

hardly be tolerated. It is to be foreseen that society will not give continued support to an institution which it regards as hostile to itself.

Apparently we are confronted with a dilemma. The school can either resign itself to trivial nurse-maiding or it can accept the invitation to commit suicide. Either alternative means a confession of defeat. To attack the social order head-on and go down with the flag nailed to the mast may have its meed of glory, but it may easily do more harm than good. There must be some way around the difficulty, or else there is nothing left for the school except to continue its age-old function of drilling into the minds of the younger generation those patterns which are best adapted to the interests of the ruling class.

Let us remind ourselves that our problem centers on the fact that pupils bring to school certain beliefs and attitudes which have been built up in the outside environment and which do not fit acceptably into the philosophy that is adopted and practiced by a democratic school. These beliefs and attitudes all relate to fixed patterns or absolute standards of value, and so

they have more kinship with the spirit of dictatorship than with the spirit of democracy. This discrepancy can neither be ignored nor can it be construed as a justification for an evangelistic campaign on the part of the schools. If the schools should start on a crusade for social reform, the irate citizen and parent would have reason for inquiring by what right the schoolmasters of the nation consider themselves commissioned to take the affairs of the whole country into their own hands. Perhaps the function of a teacher is not altogether clear, but at any rate the appointment to a teaching position does not mean either that the teacher must teach as he is told to teach by some power wielding legal authority nor that the teacher, by virtue of his office, must make it his business to impose his own personal philosophy on his pupils and on the social order.

Is there no other alternative? We can at least hold that the pupils coming to school are entitled to learn what the issue of fixed versus flexible patterns is all about. The cultural outlook which they unconsciously absorb is dominated throughout by fixed patterns—fixed pat-

terns in religion, in ethics, in art, in science, in economics, and in government. They are in no position to realize that any other point of view is possible. If our present contention is sound, *viz.*, that the democratic point of view is a challenge to the whole mass of tradition, it follows that no school can claim to be truly democratic if it does not accept the clarification of this issue as a major responsibility.

The mistake that is likely to be made at this point is to assume that a pupil has achieved insight if he has become hostile to the existing order. The rejection of a fixed pattern or set of patterns is not the same as an understanding of the function of patterns in individual and collective living. Old habits are not laid aside so easily. The new doctrine becomes simply the raw material for the old habit of insisting that life must be ordered according to immutable patterns. Hence the typical revolutionist is likely to be as fiercely intolerant of any deviation from the true faith as the most violent reactionary. He has no patience with the slow process of evolution and no faith in it. White is white and black is black to him and so the whole present order stands con-

demned, while revolution becomes the only sensible method of progress. As the goal of revolution he envisages only the establishment of a new orthodoxy with all the old trimmings of supervision and control. "‘We have come to bring you Liberty and Equality,’ Marshal Le-febre thundered the slogan of the Republic at the terrified burgomasters of Franconia, ‘but don’t let that go to your heads,’ he warned, ‘for the first one of you who makes a move without my permission will be shot.’ ” \*

Perhaps something of this spirit is necessary for the successful conduct of a revolution. But it is basically opposed to the spirit of democracy, which is as hostile to one kind of tyranny as to another. As applied to education, the moral of the story is that progress lies not in the substitution of new names for old habits but in the transformation of old habits into a new quality of mind and heart. This is a much longer and harder undertaking than a summary brushing aside of old beliefs and old forms of conduct, but it cuts deeper and it marks off the most dis-

\* J. J. Smertenko, "The Radical's Betrayal," *Harper's Magazine*, July, 1935, p. 129.

inctive trait of a democratic system of education.

This process of reconstruction naturally must find its point of departure in the discovery by the pupil that the beliefs or patterns which he happens to have acquired are inadequate, at least in the form in which they exist in his mind. Our previous discussion of democracy affords a convenient illustration. The tradition that government must govern as little as possible is still strong. This tradition, indeed, does not prevent us from having recourse to governmental interference in particular situations whenever this seems desirable in order to achieve specific ends. We levy tariffs, we forbid polygamy, we legislate for schools, and we view with equanimity the presence in Washington of a vast array of lobbies which represent all kinds of private interests. All this may be right and proper, but it hardly squares with the notion that the government is merely a kind of umpire or referee charged with the duty of seeing to it that the game is played according to the rules. The pattern does not cover the facts in the case. What, then, is the proper conception of government?

Let us grant, at least for the moment, that the school is not authorized to answer this question. The school at least has the obligation to clear away the vagueness or obscurity which prevents us from seeing straight. No other social agency has quite the same obligation in this respect. To ignore this obligation is to defraud the pupil of his right to become intelligent and to enter into a conspiracy to support the good things as they are.

From government to citizenship is but a step. The true American, so the pupil has somehow learned, gives whole-hearted loyalty to our American institutions. But what the pupil has not yet learned is that he does not know what that means. In its extreme form it may be taken to mean that there must be no changes in such matters as the public control of private property, in the status of women, in the regulation of competition, of marriage and divorce and of labor disputes, or that Catholics, Jews and Negroes must be suppressed. All this is going rather far. But if the principle of regulation and of toleration is admitted, there must be some standard for distinguishing between sound and unsound



regulation or toleration, just as there must be some standard for determining the proper functions of government. Reliance on "loyalty" means that the unsuspecting pupil is left holding the bag.

Essentially the same situation prevails all along the line. The average American holds to a pattern of "supernaturalism," which he assumes to be essential to religion. Just what this means, however, he does not know; and, what is much worse, he does not know that he does not know. He is quite unable to tell the difference between the "natural" and the "supernatural," and so he finds it necessary, in specific situations, to depend for guidance on familiar labels. The notion of art is associated in his mind with a certain body of materials which are accepted as "classical" and which, if he is properly docile, he struggles uncomplainingly to learn to like. Other materials have no claim on him until they have been properly certified by recognized authority. The upshot of it all is that he is governed by his habits and not by his intelligence. He may admire the great figures of history because they were rebels, against the tradition of

their day, and at the same time regard every present-day rebel as a nuisance and a danger that should be suppressed. Thus tradition, like conscience, makes cowards of us all. The escape from this bondage does not lie in the substitution of one set of beliefs for another, but in providing the conditions for the free play of intelligence in the reconstruction of patterns. In educational terms this is the issue between dictatorship and democracy.

This emphasis on the reconstruction of habits does not conflict with specialization in any given field, but provides specialization with a new context and a new importance. Historical perspective takes on a new meaning and becomes quite indispensable. The scientific organization of subject matter in the natural sciences ceases to be a peculiarity to which research specialists are somehow addicted and becomes a way of viewing the universe which is seriously at variance with the assumptions of tradition. Each in its own way serves to set intelligence free for the improvement of human life.

But something more is still needed. It is not enough for a pupil to discover that his inherited

attitudes or "patterns" are inadequate for the conditions of his social environment. Unless something more is offered, this discovery will either render him completely paralyzed or else will drive him back to a kind of desperate loyalty to old patterns as his only port in time of storm. At its worst this loyalty will take the form of refusing to think at all, at its best it will cling to the assumption that fixed patterns of an improved kind must somehow be obtained. Let us grant that for some, perhaps many, thoughtful pupils this will seem to be the best course to take. They will then emerge with a reconstructed outlook or way of life which is still based on fixed patterns but of a less narrow and bigoted kind. As a rule this will be a gain for democratic values, even though it does not mean the adoption of a genuinely democratic point of view. The result of such reconstruction will ordinarily mean that a greater range of human values is taken into account. Moreover, the pupil will have had valuable practice in the art of using his intelligence when confronted with new situations instead of relying on blind habit. A result of this kind must be accepted

with good grace in a democratic school if the doctrine that the enduring values of education have to do with independent reconstruction of beliefs and attitudes is to be taken seriously. But it is hardly fair to the pupil to leave him no choice. He is entitled to have it pointed out to him that there is an alternative way of life which does not involve fixed patterns at all.

The school, therefore, is clearly under the obligation to show that democracy is a way of life which breaks sharply with the past. It must not merely practice democracy but must develop the doctrine so as to make it serviceable as an intellectual basis for the organization of life. To achieve this end it must utilize the concept of democracy so as to secure continuity of program, which up to the present has been so conspicuously lacking in the progressive movement. The idea of democracy, consequently, cannot be disposed of by dealing with it in a separate course and at some fixed point in the curriculum. Just as the reconstruction of patterns or outlook is a constant concern throughout the school program, so the meaning of democracy as a way of life must be developed progressively and in-

woven with everything else, but without sacrifice of clarity. The school is, *par excellence*, the institution to which a democratic society is entitled to look for clarification of the meaning of democracy. In other words, the school is peculiarly the institution in which democracy becomes conscious of itself.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUDING CONSIDERATIONS

THE practical difficulty about all this is, of course, that public opinion, even in the most enlightened "democratic" countries, is disposed to insist on a type of education which supports fixed patterns. When this insistence is clearly conscious of its position, the whole preceding discussion of democratic education is naturally pushed aside as irrelevant. There is little profit in talking about the beauties of a continuous reconstruction of basic patterns when we are confronted with a clear-eyed demand that basic patterns must be left untouched. When divergent *Weltanschauungen* or ways of life come into conflict with demands of this kind, the time for argument is past.

Fortunately the actual situation is not quite so hopeless. The demand on the part of the

public for a conventional kind of education does not have back of it a clear realization of the issue that is involved but springs from the unconscious assumption that no other kind of education is possible. Consequently the issue becomes a question of whether the basic patterns shall be selected for the pupil by the teacher who happens to be appointed or by his parents. It is not surprising that in such a case the parents should prefer to keep the matter in their own hands. There is more than a touch of irony in the fact that the pupil, for whom the school is maintained, is left out of account. He becomes the forgotten man.

As contrasted with such an assumption the democratic school can make an honest disclaimer of any intention of predetermining the patterns. As was said before, such intention would defeat the purposes of the school. The issue then becomes a matter of bringing the pupil back into the picture. After all he is the leading figure in the play. He is the future citizen, who will have to deal with all the desperate problems which we seem unable to solve and which are bound to constitute a part of our legacy to him. If we

hem him in too closely, he becomes seriously handicapped. Unless the next generation can do a better job than we have done, the values of our civilization will be seriously endangered. He is entitled to have all the light that the school can furnish on underlying issues and he should have opportunity for the exercise of enlightened and independent judgment.

There are very many parents with whom an argument of this kind carries weight. The sense that our present civilization is in a period of rapid transition is deep and widespread. Hand in hand with this goes the disposition to recognize that certain modifications in beliefs and in forms of social organization are inevitable and presumably desirable. Hence the leaning toward fixed patterns in education is perhaps as much an expression of a fear that historic values will be surrendered too lightly as it is of a conviction that certain particular patterns are not subject to any kind of change. The world is full of people who are not altogether certain of their bearings. They are very different from those to whom the question at issue is a question of choosing between two sharply defined and conflicting



ways of life. However, they act in exactly the same way if they find themselves attacked by a hostile and "revolutionary" doctrine. This is natural enough. They do not see why they should support a school that teaches doctrines in which they profoundly disbelieve. But they can feel the force of the argument that the public school must prepare pupils for the exercise of independent judgment and that this requires a certain detached handling of controversial matters. It is on people of this kind that the school with a democratic program must rely for support.

It is not claimed that this analysis will solve all difficulties, but rather that it is a statement of certain conditions which must be taken into account. To operate effectively within the limits set by these conditions has difficulties in plenty, even if we disregard the opposition of persons for whom the issue is a clear-cut choice between conflicting ways of life. In the first place the amount of elbowroom which is left to the school varies with different communities and cannot be determined in any offhand way. Second, a certain amount of hostility and opposition is

likely to arise from those who misunderstand the purposes of the school. To gain and retain the confidence of the community in these purposes calls for both tact and for a continuous program of adult education. And it may be expected that despite all efforts situations will arise in which the teacher cannot yield to public demand without sacrifice of principle. But this appears to be the general direction in which a democratic program of education has to move.

It may be charged, however, that if, or in so far as, a program of this kind succeeds it is because it involves an element of dishonesty. In dealing with parents the case for the program is based on the argument that the pupil must have a chance to exercise independent judgment. What is not pointed out to the parent is that the school is really trying to promote a distinctive way of life—a way of life, moreover, which is at variance with the one that is held by the average parent. A plea is made for “objectivity” in dealing with controversial matters when, as a matter of fact, there is no such thing as objectivity. Every point of view is a *point of view* in the sense that it relates to a more inclu-

sive background, to an underlying way of life. The school thus pretends to be disinterested, although it is really a partisan all the time. The very organization of the school, which is avowedly for the purpose of building up habits through practice in democratic living, is an expression of partisanship. Moreover, the insistence that the ideal of democracy must be presented as an alternative to the belief in fixed patterns may be plausibly construed as further and perhaps even more direct evidence of partisanship. Why not then be candid, so the critic might argue, and admit that all education is indoctrination, which means that democracy merely fights with different weapons to secure the same end as its rivals?

The argument undoubtedly has weight. If we assume that the issue is an issue between democracy on the one hand and a dissenting position on the other which explicitly maintains that the beliefs and attitudes of pupils must be left essentially intact, then the case must be conceded. Against such a position it cannot be maintained that democratic education is neutral and seeks merely to promote independent adjust-

ment in "objective" fashion. People who think they are objective in this sense are simply deluding themselves. Education is a field in which there are no neutrals. "He that is not for me is against me."

There is, however, a loophole in the argument, and the loophole consists in the assumption that has just been mentioned. It is a vast oversimplification to assume that people who hold some non-democratic point of view are therefore committed to the doctrine that fixed patterns must be made the basis of educational procedures. To use an illustration, there is considerable difference between accepting the Euclidean system of geometry and insisting—as against more modern doctrines—that this system must be regarded as final and unchangeable. Most people accept Euclideanism because it serves well enough, and they never get far enough into geometry to see that there is any problem of finality. The illustration is incomplete at one point. Our geometry does not ordinarily give any indication of inadequacy, whereas our inherited beliefs find plenty to challenge them. As was said a moment ago,

many people are uncertain as to their bearings. This uncertainty has wide variations as to form and degree, but it is widespread. In religious circles, for example, it has been common for a long time to discount the importance of dogma. But an attitude of this kind is very different from a clear perception that democracy means a distinctive and competing way of life. To be significant, such a perception requires a considerable period of study and reflection. It cannot be maintained offhand, therefore, that the identification of democratic education with the cultivation of independent thinking is essentially false. The identification serves notice that established patterns are not to be considered binding and that the primary aim of education is to set intelligence free.

The point is that there is an essential difference. The uniqueness of democracy lies in the fact that indoctrination or inculcation would defeat its own purpose. Something must happen to the pupil other than the docile acceptance of a point of view. This something is a quality of mind and heart, which is sought through a process of continuous reorganization of outlook

or way of life. This reorganization requires both the cultivation of sensitiveness to a wide range of diverse values and the disposition to rely for interpretation and synthesis on personal judgment. Prescription or inculcation is obviously an interference with this process. Moreover, the degree to which democratic values are achieved cannot be measured by the simple procedure of inspecting the conclusions at which the pupil arrives. Back of such education lies the faith that these conclusions will be, in the long run and on the whole, in the direction of a democratic way of life. But this faith destroys itself the moment it begins to specify and fence in the conclusions that must be reached. The door must be left wide open. The quality of democratic education, like that of mercy, is not strained. Whether or not this type of education is to be called indoctrination is not nearly so important as the recognition that it has a quality of its own. Incidentally it may be noted also that there is no way known to school boards or to administrative officials which can prevent a teacher from injecting something of this quality into his daily work.

There is still another criticism to be considered. All this emphasis on an understanding of democracy as a whole way of life presupposes a capacity for philosophical thinking which we may well hesitate to assign to the common man, to say nothing of the fact that the solid mass of economic and ecclesiastical tradition stands squarely in the way. Is not this expecting too much? Opponents of democracy naturally scorn the idea that the common man can rise to any such level. Nothing is easier than to ridicule the ineptitude and bungling of democratic government. It would be fair, indeed, to retort that other forms of government have not solved the problem either, if we may judge from the present mess of things. But the question at issue cannot be solved by recrimination. What the average man is capable of cannot be determined just by looking at him, any more than the career of a newborn baby can be predicted on the basis of the data provided by the hospital. History proves merely that the common man was never given a chance to think, and then was blamed because he was unable to think. The resourcefulness often exhibited by pupils who are fail-

ures in their school work might be taken as an indication that people are not necessarily stupid because they are not good at "learning." Democratic education is obliged to stake everything on a program for the liberation of intelligence. It need not, and must not, demand uniformity of belief. Pupils come to school with all kinds of backgrounds; it is hardly conceivable that they should all emerge with the same set of conclusions. It is not to such uniformity of conclusions, but to certain habits of thinking and feeling and acting that democracy must look as its hope for the future.

To the student of present-day world events a discussion of this kind is perhaps inexcusably academic. All this talk about ways of life, so he might insist, distracts attention from the fact that we are dealing with age-old struggles and rivalries, which change their labels and their watchwords from time to time, but which remain basically the same. Racial pride is just a cover for national ambitions; Italian fascism is a revival of the dream of empire; Russian communism is the modern incarnation of old class hatreds which recognizes no distinctions of race



or creed or nationality. Why then all this talk about ways of life, which are determined by the accidents of time and circumstance, instead of keeping our attention on the old and familiar rivalries and ambitions, which relate ultimately to the desire for possession and control?

Even if all this be conceded, however, these conflicting "ways of life" have a central importance for education. For one thing, they are what make future wars possible. The average man the world over is genuinely desirous for peace. He has no stomach for wars waged for purely material ends. He has little faith in them as a business proposition. But when they are made incidental to a "way of life" the case is different. They then become tied up with all that he considers most worth while and they make their appeal in the name of patriotism and self-sacrifice. A war nowadays must be made over into a holy war before it can be got under way at all. Consequently education must concern itself with these ways of life if it is to be effective in promoting the substitution of intelligence for brute force. The cultivation of sentiments for world peace cannot be depended on for protec-

tion against times of crisis. A more promising procedure is to make education a continuous criticism of these conflicting ways of life, in the hope that these ways of life will be so transformed that the crises will not arise at all.

That the peace of the world is seriously threatened by the clash of competing ways of life is hardly open to question. In both Germany and Russia the desire for peace among the common people is strong, but this does not prevent political leaders from continuing to make faces at one another over the back fence. This is anything but a harmless sport, yet it is sanctioned because each nation believes itself to be seriously threatened in its vital interests. What are these vital interests? Unless we take a frankly and crassly materialistic point of view—which is indignantly repudiated all around—this question is not easily answered. Why, for example, does Germany fear Russia? It is not primarily because of the fact that Russia is a dictatorship. In this respect there is little to choose between the two countries. It is not, apparently, on account of the social planning and the subordination of property rights and of private profit that

is practiced in Russia. This is conceded to be sound in principle. If a rough characterization is permissible, one might describe the difference as chiefly one of emphasis—the Russian tendency in economic matters being toward the revolutionary and the doctrinaire, whereas the German attitude is more cautious and experimental. Nor is Russia's hostility toward traditional religion a major objection. In Germany the disposition on the part of the leaders to subordinate the claims of religion to considerations of state is quite as unmistakable. Nor, finally, can Russia be accused of showing a lack of consideration for the races and nationalities within its borders, since these are permitted and even encouraged to develop their own distinctive patterns of Kultur. What, then, is the shooting all about?

In terms of *Weltanschauung* the difference seems to center on the conception of race. As against the German emphasis on the significance of race it is possible to take the position that the biological significance of race is unimportant. But even if it be granted that there are important differences, these differences are open to

widely divergent interpretations. From the German point of view native differences in intelligence, in capacity for music, in the sense of personal honor, or in sensitiveness respecting matters of right and wrong, are apparently to be interpreted as evidences of the existence of a kind of "inner pattern." The inference is made that there is a distinctive racial mind, a distinctive racial music, or honor, or code of conduct which opens up a world of supreme spiritual values to the race thus favored, but which remains inaccessible to other races. These capacities are like a sixth sense revealing to its possessor the existence of a world which does not exist for others. On the other hand, it is possible to take the position that these assumed differences in capacities are in no way comparable to a sixth sense, but are rather like differences in vision, which enable some to see better than others the objects in our common environment. According to this view differences in capacity relate simply to the utilization of the environment, *i.e.*, to the creation of both ends and means for a richer life.

Each way of life, then, has its own dis-

inctive point of orientation. If we start with the official German conception of race, it is logical to condemn racial contamination as a cardinal sin and to lay claim to more territory, more room for power, as an absolute right. A claim of this kind is not open to argument, because it represents values which are absolute and final. Moreover this claim warrants a demand for unquestioning obedience on the part of the people whenever the national interests come into conflict with interests outside. On the other hand, the rival point of view must look for the content of its values, not to something that is assumed to be inherent or "instinctive" in the race, but to a growing ideal of personal and social development, such as is to be found in the democratic way of life. Unfortunately the emphasis in Russian statecraft shows an apparent tendency to shift to another point. It appears to be so absorbed in the elimination of exploitation from business and industry as to neglect the problem of what kind of a social ideal is to emerge. This absorption leads naturally to the methods of dictatorship in its internal affairs and to the methods of old-fashioned imperialism in foreign

policy. The means to a democratic life tend to become ends in themselves. Whenever this happens absolutism is in the saddle again and human beings become subordinated to a scheme of fictitious immutable values. A justification is thus provided for the fear that communism will tolerate no other form of social organization than its own and for the attempt to unite other nations in a crusade against itself.

At the present time events are moving toward an armed conflict between these opposing ways of life. Perhaps this is inevitable in any case. But the operation of intelligence in providing adjustments is alarmingly curtailed as long as human desires and passions can manage to find shelter behind an absolutistic scheme of values so as to invoke all that is holy in calling upon misguided human beings for unlimited sacrifice. As long as this remains unchanged the things which we ordinarily identify with progress, such as increasing interdependence and improvement in technology, are simply the forerunners of catastrophe. If civilization is to survive, there must be a change of base. Democracy must enter the lists, not as a symbol of a

vague humanitarianism, or of a cumbersome parliamentary procedure, but as a distinctive way of life. It must espouse a conception of values for which absolutism provides no room and which it cannot hope to understand. Educationally it must insist that no man, even though he be a teacher, has the right to appoint himself the keeper of his neighbor's soul.

Superficially, indeed, the contention that a program which encourages every normal person to engage in an independent reconstruction of experience will lead to unity in thought and action has the appearance of paradox. But paradox, as someone has said, is truth standing on its head in order to attract attention. Like every other program in this field, the democratic program of education is an adventure in faith. It rests on the faith that if the reconstruction of experience goes hand in hand with sincerity and careful self-criticism, the basis of understanding among men will be continuously widened. Honest thinking generates a deeper insight and a deeper sympathy with respect to those who arrive at different conclusions. Not only so, but faith in the democratic ideal commits us to the

faith that in the long run this way of life will gain increasingly wider acceptance, if the obstacles to the free use of intelligence are removed. There can be no other outcome, unless this reliance on intelligence is misplaced. On this point the gods offer no guarantees. But for democracy there is no choice. It stands or falls by its faith in the common man. This faith is the only basis on which it can undertake to remold the sorry scheme of things so as to make it conform more nearly to the heart's desire.



























